

NOAA Health and Safety Protocol Guidance

(updated 10/14/2021)

This document provides guidance on health and safety protocols in support of mission critical travel. Vaccination is suggested for all NOAA employees. However, at this time, travel must be approved as mission critical by an employee's travel authorizing official, when that employee has not confirmed being fully vaccinated.

When evaluating whether or not travel is mission-critical, travel authorizing officials should consider such factors as whether:

- the purpose of travel is to perform essential duties related to the protection of life and property;
- the travel is required by statute or contract;
- the travel is for systems or equipment inspections if those systems or equipment are integral to security, safety, or proper functioning of the mission;
- the travel is to meetings or trainings required by a grant or to maintain grant funding;
- the travel is for training to meet certification or licensing requirements or to maintain critical functional or occupational competencies; or
- the travel is for activities essential to national security.

Authorizing officials should also strongly consider whether:

- the meeting can alternatively be conducted by phone or video conference;
- the travel is to attend training for the purposes of professional development as opposed to maintaining existing accreditation that cannot easily be postponed;
- the travel is not time-sensitive but can be performed at a later date;
- the travel is for the sole purpose of giving a presentation; and
- the travel can be postponed, canceled, or handled remotely.

Health and Safety Protocols

For any travel determined to be mission critical, please consider the health risk potential of the travel. Risk factors to be considered include:

- Duration of travel (e.g., one day, <one week; >one week); longer is higher risk
- Number of people encountered (e.g., <2, 3-6, or >6); more is higher risk
- Duration of encounter (e.g., <5 minutes, 5-30 minutes, or > 30 minutes); longer is higher risk
- Environment of encounter (outdoors, large or well ventilated room, enclosed space, limited/poor ventilation); enclosed space with limited/poor ventilation is higher risk
- Proximity to people encountered (e.g., >12 feet, 6-12 feet, or <6 feet); less distance between is higher risk

Health and safety protocols must be in place to mitigate risk to the traveler as much as possible, commensurate with the level of risk. As such, the following minimum health and

safety protocols (based on CDC and NOAA public health guidance) should be identified and adhered to for mission critical travel:

- **Symptoms** - Travelers should consult with their supervisor / NOAA public health personnel and/or strongly consider not travelling if any of the following apply to them within 14 days of travel:
 - Symptoms including: Fever, fatigue, cough, loss of appetite, muscle aches, shortness of breath, sudden loss of smell or taste, or metallic taste in mouth
 - Been in close contact with someone confirmed or suspected of having COVID-19
 - Live with or have regular contact with someone who works at or frequents an establishment with a confirmed or suspected COVID-19 outbreak
 - Attended a large gathering (>10 people)
 - Traveled internationally or domestically to a known high risk area (e.g. hot spot)

- **Travel**
 - Solo travel in a Government Owned Vehicle (GOV) or Privately Owned Vehicle (POV) is strongly recommended.
 - Air travel should be avoided when possible; when unavoidable, consideration should be given to the following:
 - Select flights that minimize number and time of layovers.
 - Avoid layovers in areas of high risk (e.g. hot spots).
 - Taxi/shuttle service should be used on a solo basis using the most direct path (e.g. minimal/zero stops) to the extent possible.
 - Overnight travel should be avoided; when impossible to avoid, travel should be minimized to limit the number of nights spent on travel.
 - When on travel, personnel should minimize all non-essential movement away from lodging when not actively on duty.

- **Social distancing**
 - Travelers should maximize physical distancing (e.g. greater than 6 feet from others) and wear face coverings when physical distancing is not possible.
 - To the greatest extent possible, travelers should avoid contact with individuals unrelated to official travel and minimize duration of time within 6 feet of others.

- **Face Coverings**
 - Should at a minimum be a cloth mask with at least two layers. N95 masks, while generally reserved for hospital use, may be used for added protection.
 - Should be worn covering the nose and mouth at all times during all phases of travel, except as required for security protocols (e.g. airport security), eating/drinking, or other actions where a face covering reasonably prevents mission accomplishment.
 - Note: Instances involving exertion, poor ventilation, and/or close quarters with others, increase the necessity of face coverings.

- **Hygiene/Disinfecting**
 - Travelers should regularly wash their hands and avoid touching their face. When hand washing is not possible, hand sanitizer should be used.
 - Travelers should regularly clean/disinfect high touch surfaces (e.g. computer equipment, telephones, clipboards, paperwork, door handles) with disinfectant wipes or solution as available.

- **Testing**
 - Personnel should not travel if they have tested positive for COVID-19 or are symptomatic and not cleared by a medical professional to return to work.
 - NOAA-provided COVID-19 testing may be considered for travel related to safety-sensitive positions or duties where COVID-19 mitigation strategies as listed above may not be able to be implemented to the fullest extent.
 - Testing should be part of a broader conversation between the traveler and their supervisor and/or health care provider.

The majority of NOAA mission critical travel following these general health and safety protocols will typically be authorized without need for additional health and safety protocol consultation. When submitting travel justification requests, the traveler (or designated administrative point of contact) should expressly indicate relevant mitigation measures to be taken during travel. For “high risk” travel (e.g. vessel operations, attending/supporting widely attended events, multi-day exposure at a particular facility or location), travel authorizing officials should consult with the Office of Marine and Aviation Operations (OMAO) Office of Health Services (email: gary.montgomery@noaa.gov) regarding adequacy of intended health and safety protocols.